

Executive Summary

Overview

The *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* added a new reading initiative to the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act*—the Early Reading First program. It addressed the concern that many children enter kindergarten without the necessary literacy foundation to enable them to succeed in school. In fall 2009, the United States Department of Education awarded an Early Reading First grant to the Montana Office of Public Instruction (OPI) to implement the *Montana Partnership for Early Literacy* (MTPEL). OPI implemented MTPEL from January 2010 through May 2013. MTPEL had four goals:

1. All participating children will graduate with high achievement levels in language, phonological awareness, alphabet knowledge, print awareness, and classroom skills necessary to participate effectively in elementary school and to become proficient at reading.
2. All classrooms will contain the materials (instructional, play) and spatial arrangements (e.g., centers) that will support the development of children’s language and early literacy skills.
3. All teachers will achieve high levels of instructional proficiency with research-based practices through timely, targeted, sustained, and intensive professional development on children’s acquisition and use of language, phonological awareness, alphabet knowledge, and print awareness. Teachers’ instructional proficiencies are applied both to (1) children making satisfactory progress, and (2) children for whom progress monitoring identifies the need for intervention in a Response to Intervention (RTI) process.
4. All children and families will transition successfully into K-3 programs aligned with scientifically based reading research (SBRR).

To attain these goals, MTPEL combined two SBRR programs—*Opening the World of Learning* (OWL) and *Language for Learning* (LFL). These two curriculums formed the core reading program (Tier 1) in which all children participated. Based on a RTI model, children not performing at anticipated levels received additional supports in Tier 2 or Tier 3.

Data from a variety of screening, progress-monitoring, and outcome assessments supported the RTI model. These included the *Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test 4* (PPVT), *Test of Preschool Early Language* (TOPEL), *Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening* (PALS), and *Get it, Got it, Go!* MTPEL used the *Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation* (ELLCO) and the *Classroom Assessment Scoring System* (CLASS) to collect additional data on the classroom environment and instruction.

In conjunction with a comprehensive educational program in the classroom, additional programming was available to increase MTPEL children's preparedness for reading and kindergarten. Family members could participate in parent literacy events aimed to improve parents' ability to communicate with their children, build language, and support their children at home. In addition, MTPEL worked through the preschool centers to strengthen activities around the transition of children to kindergarten, and with the local education agencies to ensure alignment existed between preschool and kindergarten curriculums.

MTPEL also focused attention on improving the English language acquisition of English language learners (ELLs). MTPEL's ELLs were primarily members of American Indian tribes who attended school in an area on or near an American Indian reservation. A second population targeted in the grant was special needs children.

MTPEL provided an array of professional development opportunities—including summer and winter institutes, site-based training, coaching, professional learning communities, undergraduate/graduate coursework, and portfolio development—to MTPEL teachers, coaches, center directors, teacher assistants (TAs), and parents.

In fall 2012, OPI contracted with Education Northwest to evaluate the fourth, and final, continuation year of MTPEL. The evaluation, smaller in scope, addressed the extent to which implementation of its Early Reading First grant enabled the program to meet its goals. The evaluation relied on a mix of methodologies and included the analysis of child assessment data, the administration of surveys to center staff members, the administration of interviews to OPI staff members, and the review of project documentation.

2012–2013 Participation

From fall 2012 continuing through May 2013, approximately 40 teachers, TAs, coaches, and center directors participated in MTPEL, across four sites and 17 classrooms. These center staff members interacted with almost 300 children enrolled in MTPEL classrooms. The majority of these children were age-eligible to kindergarten in fall 2013 (62%). About three-quarters of the children (n=222) were identified as participating for the whole preschool year.

To What Extent Did MTPEL Accomplish Its Goals?

The Montana Partnership for Early Literacy (MTPEL) was largely successful in attaining its goals.

- 1. All participating children will graduate with high achievement levels in language, phonological awareness, alphabet knowledge, print awareness, and classroom skills necessary to participate effectively in elementary school and to become proficient at reading.**

While all participating children did not graduate with high achievement levels in important early reading skills, by spring 2013, almost four-fifths of MTPEL students did. The majority of children were at benchmark in the areas of knowledge of letter sounds (93%), name-writing ability (92%), expressive language (89%), upper-case letter recognition (88%), receptive language (85%), print knowledge (82%), and phonological awareness (79%).

2. All classrooms will contain the materials (instructional, play) and spatial arrangements (e.g., centers) that will support the development of children’s language and early literacy skills and all teachers will achieve high levels of instructional proficiency with research-based practices.

The evaluation measured classroom implementation and teacher proficiency in several ways, and the different measures produced different findings. According to teacher self-reports and child assessment data, teachers achieved high levels of instructional proficiency with research-based practices to create and maintain an environment conducive to children acquiring early literacy skills. Although classroom materials and arrangements were not formally evaluated in Year 4, evaluators asked teachers to rate their ability to prepare their classroom environment to engage children and language and literacy activities. Teachers self-reported growth in this area— using a five-point scale of “1” meaning low ability to “5” meaning high ability—of 0.7 (from 3.8 to 4.5). Similarly they self-reported growth, using the same scale, of 0.5 (from 4.0 to 4.5) in their ability to instruct children to best prepare them for kindergarten. Finally, teachers rated their ability to use data to prepare, differentiate, and modify instruction; teachers self-reported growth of 0.1 (from 4.2 to 4.3) on the same 5-point scale. In all cases, teachers self-reported their ability in spring 2013 in the high range.

According to child assessment scores, teachers also achieved high levels of instructional proficiency with research-based practices. Children’s receptive and expressive vocabulary, phonological awareness, and name writing skills and their knowledge of letters, letter sounds, and concepts of print improved significantly from fall 2012 to spring 2013. In addition, according to teacher reports, over three-quarters (83%) of the children were performing at or above where the average child performs in listening comprehension. Furthermore, on all but one assessment, a significantly larger proportion of children were at benchmark in spring 2013 than in spring 2010. Finally, findings also indicate that teachers’ instructional skills in these areas improved over time; almost every spring, a higher proportion of children attained benchmark than was achieved the previous spring, on every assessment.

However, evaluators found no growth on Part One of the *Teacher Knowledge Survey*. In fall 2012 and spring 2013, teachers answered just over two-thirds (69%) of the items correctly. While teachers’ knowledge increased over the year in the areas of phonological/phonemic awareness and phonics, incorporating their children’s family and culture in their classrooms, working with ELLs, and print awareness, it decreased in the areas of letter knowledge, differentiating instruction, and math.

3. **Teachers' instructional proficiencies are applied both to (1) children making satisfactory progress, and (2) children for whom progress monitoring identifies the need for intervention in a Response to Intervention (RTI) process.**

The vast majority of children making satisfactory progress in fall 2012 continued to make satisfactory progress in spring 2013 (89% to 100% at benchmark). Children not making satisfactory progress in fall 2012, and thus eligible for intervention in a RTI process, had more variable progress by spring (56% to 88% at benchmark).

Table ES-1

Percentage of Children at Benchmark in Spring 2013, by Assessment

Assessment	Percentage	
	Children Making Satisfactory Progress (Fall 2012)	Children Eligible for RTI (Fall 2012)
PPVT	96% (131)	56% (32)
TOPEL Definitional Vocabulary	96% (133)	67% (35)
TOPEL Phonological Awareness	89% (104)	60% (44)
TOPEL Print Knowledge	92% (88)	73% (69)
PALS Upper Case Alphabet Recognition	100% (33)	85% (93)
PALS Name Writing	98% (52)	88% (79)
PALS Letter Sounds	100% (56)	86% (77)

4. **All children and families will transition successfully into K-3 programs aligned with scientifically based reading research (SBRR).**

MTPEL implemented family literacy and kindergarten transition programs that would help children and families transition successfully into K-3 programs. Research shows successful transitions occur under several conditions, which MTPEL demonstrated (Pianta, Rimm-Kauffman, & Cox, 1999):

- The vast majority of parents indicated that their child enjoyed school (96%).
- Assessment results indicate that most children showed steady growth in academic skills.
- The majority of parents participated in classroom activities, field trips and family literacy events, and parents of kindergarten-bound children took advantage, or were planning to take advantage of, kindergarten transition activities.
- Some preschoolers, parents, and kindergarten teachers had the opportunity to develop relationships prior to the start of school.
- "Road Maps" and other kindergarten transitions activities established collaborative efforts between schools, parents, community groups, and social service organizations.

Finally, kindergarten teachers of a cohort of spring 2011 MTPEL graduates used a variety of SBRR curriculums and assessments to assess and monitor early literacy skills. MTPEL graduates from spring 2013 will be attending the same schools.

Montana Partnership for Early Literacy Evaluation Report